

PHARNACES I OF PONTUS AND THE KINGDOM OF PERGAMUM

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Many aspects of the history of the kings of Pontus prior to Mithridates Eupator remain unknown to modern scholars. The information that we have is scant and fragmentary, and consequently, we often rely on conjectures extracted from allusions, mostly indirect, from which sometimes very little can be inferred. Pharnaces I, the grandfather of Eupator, is considered to have been the first of the Pontic rulers to venture towards an ambitious conquest policy and, as a result, the first to establish contact with Rome¹. In this paper, we propose a reconstruction of certain episodes of Pharnaces' policy which would refute the traditional vision of a permanent enmity between Pharnaces and the kingdom of Pergamum. The mutual rivalry with Bithynia would have favoured periods of collaboration between those two kingdoms, which we will try to trace based on some obscure passages by Justin.

The first contact between Pontus and Rome that we know of is in reference to an embassy that Pharnaces sent in the year 183 B.C. At the very same time, both an embassy from Rhodes and one from Eumenes II also arrived in Rome, the former to protest the bloody conquest of Sinope at the hands of Pharnaces, and the latter, to try to settle some uncertain aspects of a dispute that also arose between Eumenes and Pharnaces (Polyb.23,9,3-4; Liv.40,2,6; cf. Str.12,3,11). It seems logical, as has been argued up to now, that the reasons for this dispute must have had as a background the territorial ambitions of Pharnaces, which would culminate in the war that he waged against Bithynia and Pergamum, and which ended in 179 B.C. with his defeat². But we find it very significant that this first Pontic mission to Rome was sent just after the end of the war between Pergamum and Bithynia in the fall of 184 B.C.³. We ought to consider the possibility that [p.62] there was a relationship between this event and the above-mentioned embassies. As was noted, it is Justin who gives us a clue to this effect when, upon referring to this war, he relates a well-known trick of Hannibal, who had found refuge in the Bithynian kingdom and was general of Prusias' army. Hannibal ordered pots with snakes in them to be launched against the enemy fleet, causing confusion among "the Pontics"⁴. The term Ponticus appears in the ancient sources, and particularly in Justin (37,1,2; 40,1,2; Trog.Prol.32), to describe that which was related to the kingdom of Pontus, and it is unlikely that it could refer to troops other than those of Pharnaces, whose kingdom already included coastal possessions⁵. There would have been nothing surprising about Pharnaces' helping Pergamum during the war: Bithynia, a neighbouring kingdom, was the natural rival of Pontus in regard to control of not only the southern coast of the Black Sea and the Thracian Bosphorus, but also of Galatia, a strategic territory. Consequently, the embassy to Rome might have had as a background the demand by Pharnaces for rewards that Eumenes refused to hand over after the war against Prusias.

This hypothesis that we are presenting may seem to contradict a passage from Trogus' Prologues, from which the opposite might be inferred, that is, that Pharnaces was allied with Prusias during this war against Pergamum⁶. Moreover, there is the traditional interpretation given to an epigraph in which the victory by Eumenes II over "Prusias, Ortiagon, the Galatians and their allies" is mentioned⁷. Regarding the former piece of evidence, it should be noted that Justin's Epitome does not mention the subsequent war between Pharnaces and Eumenes; thus, our confusion may be due to the shortening of the original account. Justin concludes this book of the Epitome with the death of Hannibal, while the Prologues reveal that in Trogus' work this same book must have concluded with the coming of Antiochus IV to the throne. In regard to the epigraph, nothing forces us to believe that the allies that are mentioned are the Pontics: one must

remember that, although Ortiagon was a Galatian chief, he is mentioned separately from his people. Thus, the allusion could be to other Galatian tribes, or, perhaps more likely, to Philip V of Macedon, who helped Bithynia in this war⁸. We should also remember there was a good relationship between Prusias' kingdom and the [p.63] Thracians, whom Attalus II had to fight (App.Mith.6; OGIS 330; Hopp 1977, 96-98). The presumed cooperation between Pharnaces and the Bithynian kingdom was questioned by F. Walbank, but his arguments have not been followed by other scholars⁹.

If Pontus did, indeed, collaborate in the fight against Prusias and Hannibal, why do the Roman sources not mention this participation in more detail? Apart from the fact that Polybius' account of this conflict has only reached us in fragments, the fact is that Pharnaces would have allied himself with Eumenes, not Rome (cf. Gruen 1984, vol.I, 112). Furthermore, we do not know how large a force Pharnaces employed. But above all, one must remember that the literary sources are not very favourable to Pharnaces. Polybius treats him with real disdain. He had many reasons to do so: first was the conquest of Sinope, the most flourishing Greek colony on Pontic Capadocia (Polyb.23.9.3-4; Liv.40.2.6; Ballesteros Pastor 1998, 57); what is more, the foundation of Pharnacia from the synoecism of Cotyora and Cerasus, might have harmed Sinope, their metropolis (Str.12,3,17; cf. Xen.Anab.5,5,7-10). But, first of all, Pharnaces is criticized for later having undertaken expansionist enterprises which put in danger the geopolitical balance of Asia Minor, and of Euxinus itself, and which Rome undoubtedly frowned upon. Furthermore, many later sources would have had little interest in highlighting the occasions in which Pontus had acted in favor of Roman interests as an ally kingdom. Such is the case regarding the help that Mithridates V gave to Rome in the Third Punic War, which only Appian mentions (Mith.10).

The Pontic War that took place shortly after the Pontic embassy to Rome might have been in part due to Pharnaces' dissatisfaction over not seeing his territorial expectations fulfilled. After the war against Prusias, Eumenes would have had a "corridor" from his kingdom to the Bithynian coast, to the city of Tiejium, which Pharnaces laid siege to in 181 B.C. and which bordered Amastris, then the western limit of the Pontic territory¹⁰. Thus, Pharnaces might have expected an increase in the coastal territory of his kingdom, which, as we have seen, was at the core of his program of government.

But the cooperation between Pharnaces and the kingdom of Pergamum is seen even more clearly in another passage by Justin. In the speech by Mithridates Eupator to his troops (88 B.C.) he specifically mentions that Pharnaces was [p.64] named as the successor to Eumenes II¹¹. It is difficult to establish precisely when the king of Pergamum took that action or the reasons for it. Niese (1903, 74, n.5) pointed to two possible moments: the Peace of Apameia (188 B.C.) or the peace of 180/79 after Pharnaces' war. The first of these dates is unlikely due to the absence of any mention of the Pontic kingdom in the agreements. The other possibility, that is, after the treaty subsequent to the defeat of Pharnaces, makes some sense. It is known that Attalus III was not born until 168 B.C. (Allen 1983, 189-94, for discussion); before his birth, Eumenes had had to convince his brother, the future Attalus II, not to accept the Roman offers for help in becoming an independent king¹². The naming (perhaps unofficial rather than official) of Pharnaces as successor might have been a ploy by Eumenes to dissuade the members of his family from any attempt to take the throne against his will. Pontus was at that moment a valuable ally: it maintained submissive relationships to Roman power, since its amicitia was instituted at the end of the war and would continue into the rule of Mithridates IV, who was also an ally of Pergamum (IOSPE I² 402; OGIS 375; Polyb.33,12,1). However, at the same time, Pontus shared with Pergamum the suspicion of an ever-present threat from Bithynia, which had its eye on taking over the entire southern coast of Propontis¹³, and all the more so when about 178-177 B.C. Prusias II returned to his policy of rivalry with Pergamum when he married Apame, Perseus' sister (Liv.42,12,2; App.Mac.11,2, Mith.2,3; Hopp 1977, 43). Rome, which appears not to have taken a special interest in the fact that the excessive strengthening of the kingdom of Pergamum could substantially alter the balance of

power in Asia, will give a clearly favorable treatment to the Bithynians to the detriment of Eumenes, who felt ill-treated by his former protectors (Will 1967, 245; Hopp 1977, 56-58; Burstein 1980). Perhaps Eumenes proposed an union with Pontus as a means of getting out of an uncomfortable international situation. Precisely for that reason, it is difficult to accept another hypothesis by Niese, who argues that the decision to make Pharnaces Eumenes' successor would have been made directly by Rome (Niese 1903, 74 n.5; [p.65] *cf. contra* Gruen 1984 vol.II, 554 n.109). Rome, as we have seen, turned its back on the powerful Attalid kingdom and used the dynastic troubles as a means of maintaining its position as arbiter among the kingdoms of the East (Badian 1958, 111). The union between Pontus and Pergamum would have undoubtedly meant the creation of a great power in Anatolia, which would have kept a suffocating grip on Bythnia and Galatia, as well as an important presence on the coast of Euxinus. In any case, although the recognition of Attalus III as successor to the throne of Pergamum would have caused Pharnaces' aspirations to disappear, their memory would have been perpetuated in the pro-Pontic sources, which represents the taking of Asia by Mithridates Eupator more as a reconquering of what belonged to him by inheritance than an appropriation of a foreign territory¹⁴.

Pharnaces was, then, the first Pontic king to undertake a foreign policy of great magnitude and he made his kingdom an important power within the framework not only of Anatolia, but also of Euxinus itself. Thus, the expansion of his interests towards the Northern Euxinus, seen in the treaty with Chersonesos (*IOSPE I*², 402), could have been recorded by subsequent Roman historians as an actual annexation of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, which would later be reflected in the time of Eupator as part of the ancestral territory of the Pontic crown (Iust.37,1,9; App.*Mith.*55, 55, 107, *BC*1,76; Vell.2,22,3). The union between Pontus and Pergamum would have been a big step forward in the formation of a great Pontic state. Although Pharnaces failed in his attempts, Mithridates Eupator was to return to the old aspirations of his grandfather, which served in part as a justification for his conquest policy.

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1. On this subject, see McGing 1986, 13-42; Ballesteros-Pastor 1996, 27-30; 442-443.
2. On this war, see McShane 1964, 161-163; Will 1967, 242; Hopp 1977, 44-48; Burstein 1980; Allen 1983, 79; McGing 1986, 26-31; Habicht 1989, 328 ff.
3. About this date, cf. Habicht 1956, 98 with n.2.
4. Iust.32,4,7: *Id primum Ponticis ridiculum visum, fictilibus dimicare, qui ferro nequeant*. See further Nep.*Han.*10,4-11,6; Front.*Str.*4,7,10-11;
5. Apart from Sinope, the Pontic Kingdom relied at least on Amisus (Memn.16; cf. McGing 1986, 21; Saprykin 1994, 87) and Amastris (Memn.9,4).
6. Trog.*Prol.*32: *in Asia bellum ab rege Eumene gestum adversus Gallum Ortiagontem, Pharnacem Ponticum et Prusian, adiuvante Prusian Hannibale Poeno*.
7. Segrè 1932. Habicht 1957, 1099, finds another possible allusion to Pharnaces in Nep.*Han.*10,2 [Hannibal] *conciliabat ceteros reges*.
8. On Philip: Polyb.23,1,3; 23,3,1; Liv.39,46,9; Nep.*Han.*10,2; Habicht 1956, 100; McShane 1964, 164; Hopp 1977, 41; Will 1967, 241.

9. Walbank 1979, 254 *ad* 24,1,2; cf. *contra* Hopp 1977, 41. See Habicht 1957, 1099. McShane 1964, 160, does not mention Pharnaces among the allies of Prusias.
10. D.S.29,23; cf. Polyb.25,2,7; Hopp 1977, 43 n.50. The conquest of Tiejum by the Attalids is deduced from the terms of the final agreement of Pharnaces' War (Polyb.25,2,7). For discussion, see McShane 1964, 162 with n.43; Hopp 1977, 43 with n.50; McGing 1986, 27 n.73. On Amastris, see Meyer 1925, 117.
11. Iust.38,6,1: *Sic et avum suum Pharnacen per cognitionum arbitria succidaneum regi Pergameno Eumeni datum*. Seel 1972, 418, who follows his own edition (Teubner, Stuttgart 1972², 261), translates this phrase as follows: "mit Hilfe willkürlicher Rechtssprüche dem König von Pergamon, Eumenes, als Nachfolger aufgenötigt worden". Nisard's edition (Didot, Paris 1841, 531-532) transcribes *cognitionum*, and translates it thus: "choisi par un tribunal de famille pour succéder à Eumène". In either case, the naming of Pharnaces as his successor would be obvious (cf. Niese 1903, 74 n.5). The problem with Seel's translation is that it has a negative tone, while the tone of Mithridates' speech is precisely the opposite, that is, he wants to demonstrate the legitimate rights of Pontus over the province of Asia as well as the treachery of the Romans.
12. Polyb.30,1,7-30,2,8; 33,18,1-4; cf. Plu.*Mor.* 184b; 489e-f. Against this possible rivalry between these brothers, see Leschhorn 1996, 92-95.
13. The passage between Aegean and Euxinus is an ever-present question: in the war against Pharnaces, Eumenes proceeded to close off the Euxinus (Polyb.38,7,5), just as Nicomedes III did when the First Mithridatic War broke out (App.*Mith.* 12).
14. Iust.38,7,7: *proximas regni Attalici opes aut veteres Lydiae Ioniaeque audierint, quas non expugnatum eant, sed possessum*; cf. 38,5,3.

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